

# ***Der Fuehrer Clips The Luftwaffe's Wings & Helps USAAF***

**By  
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In the winter of 1943, the United States, Britain and their allies were frantically positioning forces in Great Britain for the invasion of France, planned for May of 1944. At the same time, the pressure mounted for the USAAF and RAF to expedite their battle to win air superiority before D-Day, especially the ground commanders who had learned the importance of controlling the sky above the battlefield. The British had learned it early on and most American ground commanders learned it during the fighting in North Africa and the Mediterranean. Of course, the entire world had witnessed Germany's experience in the summer of 1940—when the Luftwaffe needed to win air superiority before German ground forces could attempt to invade Great Britain. However, RAF fighters defeated the Luftwaffe during “The Battle of Britain” and Hitler postponed the invasion and invaded Russia instead (There's evidence that Hitler admired and respected the British and never really wanted to invade Britain--but hoped to befriend them).

American and British military chiefs correctly agreed that the bulk of the aerial combat to win control of the sky before D-Day would have to be fought during daylight and deep inside Germany—and the USAAF would have the leading role. But in the past, the under-strength 8<sup>th</sup> AF had been unable to sustain attacks deep inside Germany without fighter escort, due to prohibitive losses. Consequently, their air campaign (code name: Pointblank to destroy the Luftwaffe and Germany's aircraft industry) had fallen behind. On 3 December 1943, Air Chief Marshal Portal, the designated coordinator of British and American air activity in Europe, bluntly told British and American political and military leaders that Pointblank “....was at that time a full three months behind schedule.” Portal's statement added more pressure, to an already pressure packed situation, for the USAAF to get the job done.

The USAAF's irascible task master, General “Hap” Arnold, didn't need to be prodded by Portal or anyone else. Launching a decisive bombing effort and winning air superiority had long been Arnold's goal. And since the summer of 1942, he had been pressuring General Ira Eaker to do more with the under-strength and partially trained 8<sup>th</sup> AF—many times unreasonably so.

In anticipation of the all-out air campaign to win air superiority before D-Day, Arnold had also supported the creation of another strategic air force and realigned his major commanding generals in Europe and the Mediterranean. He had chosen his “most trusted lieutenant,” General “Tooey” Spaatz to be the USAAF's senior general in Europe with the 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Strategic Air Forces under his command. These two air forces would have the primary responsibility for reducing Germany's military might and winning control of the skies.

Although General Spaatz displayed less emotion than Arnold, he was every bit as determined to defeat the Luftwaffe. Spaatz was not only convinced of the importance of winning air superiority, but he also knew how bloody such an air campaign could be, since he had suffered the heartache of sending his young airmen out to die in North Africa and the Mediterranean air campaigns. Nevertheless, he remained resolute in his job to unleash his bombers and fighters against the Nazi war machine; because he was convinced that airpower would be a crucial factor in ensuring a successful D-Day invasion and the defeat of Germany.

As mentioned in a previous article, published in the 4 November 2010 issue of *THE WRIGHT STUFF*, not until the fall and winter of 1943 had the 8<sup>th</sup> Strategic Air Force been provided adequate forces to accomplish their assigned mission. By December 1943, the 8<sup>th</sup> AF had two thirds of its planned strength of B-17's and B-24's and the remainder would soon arrive. In addition, the 15<sup>th</sup> Strategic AF in the Mediterranean was being readied to assist. But the 8<sup>th</sup> AF's most important addition was the availability of long-range fighters, two groups of P-38's and one group of 9<sup>th</sup> AF P-51's, with more of both on the way. From now on, the bombers would have continuous fighter protection to and from any target in Germany. Despite the fighter protection, intelligence experts guesstimated the 8<sup>th</sup> AF alone could lose 200 bombers on their first major attack.

Although the impatient Arnold had confidence in Spaatz, he couldn't resist sending one more message to him and his top commanders, to let them know that he expected nothing less than all out attacks against Germany and the Luftwaffe. Arnold's 27 December 1943 message read as follows:

“1. Aircraft factories in this country are turning out large quantities of airplanes, engines and accessories.

2. Our training establishments are operating twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week training crews.

3. We are now furnishing fully all the aircraft and crews to take care of your attrition.

4. It is a conceded fact that OVERLORD (D-Day Invasion of France) and ANVIL (Invasion of Southern France) will not be possible unless the German Air Force is destroyed.

5. Therefore, my personal message to you—this is a MUST—is to, **destroy the Enemy Air Force wherever you find them, in the air, on the ground and in the factories.**”

Spaatz faced one of the most daunting task of the war—doing something that neither the Luftwaffe nor the RAF could do—winning air superiority over enemy territory during daylight. British intelligence's (from which the 8<sup>th</sup> AF got most of its information regarding the Luftwaffe), monitored German communications and intercepted messages indicating that a shortage of aviation fuel and pilots were impacting the Luftwaffe's readiness and flying

activities. Despite the communications intercepts, the British concentrated on aircraft numbers to estimate the Luftwaffe's capability—maybe because the information could be verified with some degree of accuracy by aerial reconnaissance. Spaatz was told that notwithstanding the RAF and USAAF bombing efforts, the Luftwaffe's fighter force had grown stronger on the Western Front. They reported that in June 1943 the Luftwaffe had had 591 single-engine fighters in the west and by October that number had increased to 700. Most of the increase was due to the redeployment of fighters from the Mediterranean. They also reported that German aircraft production appeared to be as strong as ever.

As a matter of fact, Germany's aircraft production increased after the USAAF intensified the bombing of their factories in early 1944. This was due in part because the Germans had never utilized the aircraft industry's full production capacity, due to their quick victories in the beginning; consequently they were able to expand production relatively easy. The Germans also dispersed their factories and put some underground making it more difficult to damage their production capability. In addition, they were very adept at repairing their factories when they were bombed.

The practice of counting aircraft to evaluate the effectiveness of the USAAF's bombing effort continued even after the Luftwaffe's fighter defense had obviously started to wane in February and March of 1944. Needless to say, reporting an increase in Luftwaffe aircraft didn't do much for the morale of the American airmen who were fighting and dying at a rapid rate. If air intelligence had had the capability to fully evaluate the impact of the pilot and fuel shortage, they would have found the Luftwaffe had been suffering from a chronic shortage of fighter pilots for about three years. The problem first surfaced immediately following their defeat during the "Battle of Britain." At the time, General Adolph Galland, the Luftwaffe fighter commander explained to Hitler and Reich Marshal Hermann Goering the reasons for their defeat. He stated **their air force was too small**, their fighter's range too limited and faulty tactics (not allowing the fighters to leave the bombers to engage the RAF fighters). But Hitler and Goering viewed Galland's reasons as excuses for failure and Galland's pleas for more pilots and a larger fighter force fell on deaf ears.

Later, the problem was exacerbated by spreading the Luftwaffe's meager fighter forces thinly over three fronts (Europe, Russia and the Mediterranean). Despite the pilot shortage in Europe, the 8<sup>th</sup> AF's unescorted and sporadic bombing attacks didn't expose the Luftwaffe's lack of depth and staying power. But starting in February 1944, 8<sup>th</sup> AF's P-51's and P-38's aggressively engaged Luftwaffe fighters deep inside Germany, while massive formations of bombers attacked critical targets. Stunned by their high losses, the Luftwaffe quickly had to husband their fighter forces and limit their defense to the most critical German targets. As a result, the Luftwaffe ceded most of the sky over Germany to the USAAF. (However, thousands of people and guns were soon added to the German AAA force for target defense and the USAAF's losses continued at a very high rate).

In April 1944, General Galland told his superiors that the USAAF had won “air supremacy” and he made a desperate plea for more pilots. He said extremely high pilot losses included many flight captains, squadron and group commanders. Galland told them that the *Luftwaffe*’s pilot training program had fallen hopelessly behind and asked for more instructors, more aircraft and more airfields to train new fighter pilots. But once again, Hitler and Goering ignored his pleas—which made fighter pilots the Achilles’ heel of the *Luftwaffe*. The USAAF won air superiority—not by bombing Germany’s aircraft industry—but by quickly reducing the *Luftwaffe*’s most critical resource—fighter pilots.

If a deeper intelligence look had been possible, it would have also shown that Hitler’s continued interference with the *Luftwaffe* denied them of the most advanced fighter of WWII—the Me-262. In my humble opinion, of all the advanced weapons the Germans introduced during WWII, the Me-262 offered the most potential to influence the fighting in Europe.

Hitler’s first decision that delayed the Me-262 program came in August 1940, after his bloodless victories and lightning Blitzkriegs, when he decided total victory was close at hand. As a result, he decreed that the development of new weapon systems that couldn’t be made ready for combat within 18 months be put on hold. Although that order included the Me-262, Ernst Udet, Chief of Air Supply for the *Luftwaffe*, ignored it and secretly continued development of the Me-262—but at a much slower pace.

The Me-262 first flew on July 18, 1942 and reached a record-breaking 530-mph, without a significant in-flight problem. Ten successful ME-262 flights quickly followed, each achieving a record breaking 530 mph. However, the Me-262 had a chronic takeoff problem, because the first one was a “tail dragger” and the mass of the aircraft engines, fuselage and wings blocked the airflow across the tail surface. Without lift, the tail failed to lift during takeoff and some braking action and forward stick pressure was required to raise it. A tricycle landing gear quickly corrected that problem and the Messerschmitt test pilot and engineers were convinced the 262 was ready for production—as were many in the *Luftwaffe*. But the Nazi regime was reluctant to produce the Me-262 and a pilot error accident didn’t help the situation.

Finally in May 1943, General Galland flew the ME-262 as part of an effort to gain Hitler’s approval for production. On his first flight, Galland immediately saw the ME-262’s superior performance as the solution to both the shortage of pilots and aviation fuel, since jet engines could burn most fuels, from low-grade kerosene to aviation gas. Galland was so impressed with ME-262 he said, “I would rather have one ME-262 than five ME-109’s.” He recommended starting mass production as soon as possible and producing 100 immediately for tactical tests. Most experts agree that production could have started within a few months at a rate of 60 aircraft per month, which could of have been increased rapidly to 200 per month. But the mulish Hitler demanded more tests.

Albert Speer, one of Hitler's closest henchmen, said that in September 1943 Hitler arbitrarily ordered a halt to preparations for large-scale production of the ME-262. Then on January 7, 1944, after hearing about British experiments with jet aircraft, Hitler flip-flopped and ordered immediate production of as many ME-262's as could be built. BUT, he demanded the ME-262 be modified and used as a "blitz bomber."

Changing the world's greatest fighter into a "Band-Aid" bomber delayed the ME-262's entry into combat again. The delay occurred at a critical time when the ME-262 offered Germany its best defense against USAAF daylight attacks. While the first 125 ME-262's sat on the factory ramp, undergoing Hitler's so called "Blitz Bomber" modifications, about half were destroyed by 8th AF bombers. Attempts to use the ME-262 as a bomber were nonevents. Finally in March 1945, in one of his many mood swings, Hitler ordered that all the ME-262 "Blitz Bombers" be converted immediately to fighters—but the game was over.

If Hitler hadn't interfered, it appears the Luftwaffe could have easily had **at least 300 operational Me-262's before D-Day**, because even with his meddling, more than 1400 were produced, 500 of which were built in 1944. I firmly believe that with a few hundred operational Me-262's, the Luftwaffe would have added at least a couple of extra innings to the air war and possibly delayed the risky D-Day invasion or made it much more dicey.

Several times from the cockpit of my P-51, I watched helplessly as Me-262's zipped around the sky and attacked the bombers. One time while leading the element of the second flight in my squadron, we observed about ten Me-262's attacking the bombers. Before we could get close enough to engage them, the 262's broke away and headed home. We gave chase, but the best we could do was to keep them in sight—only because the Germans had to throttle back to conserve fuel. The first flight in my squadron caught some as they entered the traffic pattern near their airfield close to Prague, Czechoslovakia and shot a couple of them down. I cut some grass, to stay below streams of burning golf balls and managed to strafe a 262 on its landing roll, while my wingman cut another row of grass and strafed a 262 taxiing on the ramp.

My limited research leads me to think that due to his blunders, Hitler may have been one of our best allies in the air war in Europe. He appears to have been the type who believed he was always the smartest person in the room and as such never learned the art of listening. I sometimes wonder if President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill had interfered with pure military matters as much as Hitler had—the war in Europe might have become our first stalemate.

*Brigadier General Richard M. Baughn entered the Army Air Force aviation cadet training program in January 1943 and received his pilot wings and commission as second lieutenant in April 1944 and retired from the US Air Force in July 1975. He has a BS degree from the University of Maryland and is a command pilot with more than 7,600 flying hours, including*

*more than 5,000 in jet fighter aircraft. He has flown the P-40; P-51; P-47; F-80; RF-80; T-33; F-84B, F, and G; F-86E,F and H; F-100C,D and F; F-104A, C and D; F-105D and F; F-4C,D and E; A-6; F-111A and E; FB-111; KC-135; Meteor; Hawker Hunter and Lightning. He flew combat in P-51's with the 8th AF during WWII and in 1965-66 he flew three temporary F-105 combat tours, one at Tahkli and two at Korat, Thailand, before completing a full F-105 combat tour in 1966, as the commander of the 13th TFS. In addition to a full complement of F-105 fighters, the 13th TFS was also assigned all of Korat's F-100 and F-105 Wild Weasels and about half of Baughn's mission were flown with them. In June 1974 General Baughn was appointed deputy defense attaché, Defense Attaché Office, Saigon, Republic of Vietnam, his last assignment prior to his retirement. His book "The Hellish Vortex: Between Breakfast and Dinner," a carefully researched historical novel about a WWII P-51 pilot in the 8th AF, won a 2008 Eric Hoffer Notable Award for fiction and a 2008 honorable mention award for fiction from The Writer's Digest. The Hellish Vortex is available at Amazon.com in both paperback and electronically in Kindle.*